

# **I Met Jesus: a Boy and His Bread**

## **John 6:1-15, 32-35**

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We are doing a series of messages from the Gospel of John where we meet people who met Jesus. Most of these encounters appear to be providentially random, but the effect of the encounter on the person was life-changing. Thus far we've met a prophet named John the Baptist, a religious leader named Nicodemus, and a notorious woman not named, but known as the woman at the well. These three are very different in one respect from our character today. Comparatively we know a great deal about them, their background, their story, and their motivation in meeting Jesus. We know none of these things from our character today. We don't know his name. We don't know what happened to him. We don't know why he was there. He's hardly mentioned. But what he brings to the story and what Jesus does produced one of the most memorable moments recorded for us in Scripture.

### **The Story Before the Story**

#### **God to Israel in the wilderness – "It's not about the manna"**

In a deserted place, God supernaturally provided food for the Israelites (Exodus 16:1-15). Moses later explains the event.

*He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:3, NIV)*

In other words, the giving of the manna was to teach Israel that life is not sustained by the actions of man or the food man produces but the real source of life and nourishment is God Himself. Therefore, who should you trust?

What I want you to see from the Old Testament background is that God provided food, but the point wasn't the food. The food was a metaphor to communicate to Israel God's ability to meet man's need. Man needs more than physical bread. It makes you wonder what we really need. Keep listening.

#### **Jesus on holiday**

*"After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples." (John 6:1-3)*

The other gospels make it clear that Jesus is on a holiday. The toll of ministry was requiring some down time for him and his disciples, so they withdrew to a solitary place. It was so solitary that its isolation becomes part of the story.

Verse 2 says that a large crowd was following Him on account of the healings and miracles that He had done. So Jesus arrives at His remote holiday location to rest and recover and verse 5 says, *"Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him..."*



“Large crowd” is to say it quite modestly. Verse 10 says that this crowd included about 5,000 men. Why they didn’t count the women and children, we don’t know. But when including women and children, estimates for the crowd are between 10 and 20 thousand people. Let’s just cut that down the middle and say its 15,000 people. How big is a crowd 15,000 people?



Imagine going on vacation, getting to that quiet and remote little cabin in the backwoods... you’re about to get into the hammock and you look back and up the driveway come 15,000 people. How would you react? *Waving hands, Stop! Nooo! Go home! How are we going to feed all these people?*

Jesus sees the crowd and you know what He sees? He sees people in need, but it’s different need than you might think. *“Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was*

*coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."* (John 6:4-7)

So who is our character for this week? You might suspect it is Philip. He's the first guy mentioned. He's a disciple. Leader in the early church. Certainly it's him. Actually, no. Phillip's role here is bewilderment and confusion. Can you hear the disciples? *Who told them we were coming here?* Peter points to John. John points to Judas. Jesus asks Philip, *Where are we going to buy bread so these people may eat?* Philip looks at 15,000 people and makes a comment dripping with sarcasm. *Two hundred denarii wouldn't provide even a crumb for all of them!* Two hundred denarii was the better part of a year's wages back then. It was a large sum of money. But this was a huge crowd.

Note what it says in verse 6, *[Jesus] said this to test [Philip] for he himself knew what he would do.* Good storytelling and good theology. Jesus already knew that this crowd was about to get a demonstration of Messianic power. Jesus was raising the seemingly impossible prospect to prepare their hearts for what He was going to do.

Is this the first time in the Bible we find a massive crowd of Jews in a wilderness situation with no provision for their needs? Wait, that sounds familiar. God took Israel into the wilderness. Why? As we just saw, so that Israel would be humbled and hungry and find that what they really needed was not bread but God.

Might this story have just gotten interesting for you? You find yourself in the story. You are living your own kind of wilderness experience. Like Phillip, you are searching for a human solution. But the issue or conflict seems beyond all your resources to solve. Your 200 denarii of solutions can't begin to fix it. You're in the wilderness, you're hungry, and there's not a grocery store in sight. Enter now our person of the week.

*"One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"*" (John 6:8-9)

Somehow Andrew found a boy with a little food. Maybe a lunch pail. What do we know about the boy? He was a small boy in a very remote place. It's safe to assume that he was tagging along with his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were excited about Jesus and His healings and miracles and they along with thousands of others were drawn to Him even here. Can you hear how this journey went?

"Dad, why are we walking so far?"

"Son, Jesus is up there. We're going to see Him."

"Dad, are we there yet?"

"Son, we're closer now than the last time you asked."

"Dad?"

"Yes, son."

"I have to go to the bathroom. I'm tired. I want to go home."

What obvious one have I neglected? *"I'm hungry."* This boy either had a good mom or was a Boy Scout. He was carrying a brown bag lunch. There were no happy meals to be had along the way. They were on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. So his mom packed him a few common staples of the day – five small loaves of barley bread. They would have been flat like pita bread. Small. Barley was the cheapest bread of the day. With it, he had two small fish. These were likely pickled fish, like sardines. Very small. Boy size. The picture is

intended to evoke amusement. This isn't a meal, this is an appetizer. This isn't lost on Andrew. His view of the situation of the loaves and fishes is, *"What are they for so many?"*

Do you see the extremes in the story? The place is extremely remote. The crowd is extremely huge. The need is extremely great. The resources are extremely small. This is just the kind of situation God likes to put His people in to show us something about Him. Are you standing in the wilderness? Are you looking at the need and looking at your resources, your five loaves and two pickled fish, and thinking, *There ain't no way!* Hold that thought.

*"Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.' Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten." (John 6:10-13)*

After giving thanks, He began breaking the bread. He kept breaking it off. And kept breaking it off. And kept breaking it off. No doubt, the disciples were right there as He did it. They were probably staring as He broke the bread off but the loaf didn't shrink. Can you see them looking at each other? What was going on? How's He doing that? He kept tearing and tearing and tearing. Filling basket after basket. The miracle, of course, was the creation of bread as he tore it off.

Before you say, that can't happen...*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* (John 1:3, NIV) Jesus is really good at creating things. This miracle is a small display of what He did in creation and continues to do every day energizing and animating the life of the universe. If you can create galaxies, creating a little bread isn't so hard.

Jesus creates enough bread and fish for everyone. Verse 12 says, *When they had eaten their fill.* It's important to see that Jesus doesn't send anyone away hungry. He provides everything that 15,000 people need. In fact, there were leftovers. It just so happens that after everyone had ate all that they wanted, there was just enough for 12 lunch baskets to be filled. Now who do you suppose Jesus had in mind with 12 baskets of leftovers? It might relate to the 12 tribes of Israel, but I know 12 guys there who were happy to leave with a doggy-bag – the single disciples especially.

The story concludes with this; *"When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'"* Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." (John 6:14-15)

It dawns on the people that they have not only seen a miracle, but eaten a miracle. This miracle re-enacted the experience of Moses and the manna of the Old Testament. The Messianic expectation among the Jews in that day was at a fever pitch. Someone in the crowd yells, "He's the Prophet, let's make him our King! All Hail the King!" Fifteen thousand people began to get stirred up to coronate Jesus on the spot. But this wasn't God's plan or time and it wasn't at all the purpose of the miracle. Their reaction showed that they really didn't understand the point of it all. Jesus quickly withdrew from them.

I want to quickly jump ahead in the text because this is one of the miracles where Jesus tells us what its true purpose and meaning is. You see in verse 16 the narrative of Jesus walking on the water to the disciples who are crossing the sea at night. This is when Peter gets out of the boat and sinks into the water...They then arrive in Capernaum. The next day (Verse 22) the crowd realizes that Jesus is not there but no boats had left in the night. They are confused. *Where is Jesus? We're hungry. Let's find him!* A large group of them get into boats and head for Capernaum supposing Jesus is there. Sure enough He is and verse 25ff. This conversation goes all the way to verse 58. One part is most important.

*"Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:32-35) "I am the bread of life." This is the first of seven "I am" statements in John.*

<i>Bread of Life</i>	<i>6:35</i>
<i>Light of the world</i>	<i>8:12</i>
<i>The Gate</i>	<i>10:7</i>
<i>Good Shepherd</i>	<i>10:11</i>
<i>Resurrection and Life</i>	<i>11:25</i>
<i>Way, Truth, and Life</i>	<i>14:6</i>
<i>The True Vine</i>	<i>15:1</i>

Each of these is a Messianic self-disclosure, a self-description of His nature and mission.

*I am the Bread of Life?* What does that mean? It must be understood in the context of the miracle of feeding bread to 15,000 people. He describes the statement in the latter part of verse 35: *Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

Notice the parallels. First of all, whoever. Jesus puts no qualifier on this. His provision is available to any and to all. We see this in the miracle. He provided bread for each and every one of the 15,000 gathered. There was no discrimination over who got the bread and who did not. All were filled. "Comes to me" is paralleled with "believes in me." To believe is to come and to come is to believe. Both describe seeking Jesus as the source and substance of spiritual salvation and satisfaction. Finally, hunger and thirst. Here we have the qualification. Jesus is bread to those who are hungry for Him, meaning, like a hungry man seeking bread, the sinner longs for salvation and spiritual satisfaction in Christ. He is in that way, bread for the soul.

### **What is Jesus Saying and What Was the Feeding of 15,000 Really All About?**

The miracle of the multiplying bread pictures the salvation Christ offers in Himself as the Bread of Life:

Bread	<i>His body</i>
Broken	<i>Crucifixion</i>
Multiplied	<i>Atonement offered and applied</i>
Crowd	<i>Mankind</i>
Requirement	<i>Hunger</i>
Eating	<i>Believing/personal receiving</i>
Satisfaction	<i>Fullness/completeness of Christ</i>
Extra bread	<i>His all-sufficiency</i>

When Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life*," it didn't mean He was a baker, it means He is a Savior. Hungry people the world over eat bread with an understanding of what the bread inside their stomach means. Take it. Believe it will satisfy. Place it in your mouth. Chew it. Savor it. Bring it into you inwardly by swallowing. Feel its satisfaction of hunger. This is what the crowd didn't understand. Their thoughts toward Jesus were material and fleeting. They were just about their bellies being filled. Jesus as their King was a means to their superficial need.

People still seek Jesus in the same way. They experience need in a wilderness experience of their life. Life is difficult. Life is hard. They feel desperation and seek Jesus to fix or heal or meet some temporary need. They pray for God's help. That's good and we should do that. But if that is all we seek, we are like the Jews who simply wanted their bellies filled. Jesus didn't die for our hunger, He died for our sins and to save us from God's righteous judgment of them. "*I am the bread of life*" had nothing to do with empty stomachs but had everything to do with empty hearts and souls.

"*I am the bread of life.*" *I am the broken and multiplied Savior of the world.* That's what the miracle was about. The boy provided the bread, but it had to be broken and multiplied to meet the needs of the many.

That is what it means for Jesus to be the Bread of Life. His mission. His love for mankind. His willingness to be personally broken that His death in our place could be multiplied over and over again across the centuries, even to us here today. He is the Bread of Life, which can be received by faith into the soul and will satisfy our spiritual hunger forever. Sinners are hungry people – hungry for forgiveness; hungry for life – eternal life.

Like the manna in the Old Testament, it wasn't about the bread, it was about Him. In fact, I wonder, what was Jesus thinking as He broke the bread, over and over and over again? *This is my body which is broken for you. And this. And this. And this.* Over and over. Every tear and every piece was a picture of Jesus' body broken on the cross.

"*I am the Bread of Life*" implies a final question, is He your Bread of Life? Every man, woman and child in the crowd that day was a picture of this room as well. Jesus offers Himself like bread to us. Each one of us must decide if we believe He is the source of eternal life. Are you hungry for Him? Will you personally receive Him by faith as Savior?

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